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Return of The Judaeans

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History 499: Senior Thesis

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## **Introduction**

The Second Jewish Revolt is a highly debated event amongst classical scholars. Many argue over whether or not it began as the Historia Augusta claims that a ban on circumcision caused the revolt or if the major cause of the revolt was Hadrian's decree for Jerusalem to be changed to Aelia Capitolina, as Dio Cassius mentions. The contradiction of the few sources we have creates a historical problem which has puzzled many historians. The truth is that neither side can be fully proved due to the lack of primary sources, and more importantly the specific cause is arbitrary to the bigger picture of the real cause of the revolt. This true reason that the Second Jewish Revolt began is due to two continually conflicting ideologies that were forced to coexist in one empire for hundreds of years; these two are (1) Hellenism and (2) Messianism. These two ideologies acted as two continental plates of thought and culture that resided next to each other and occasionally when the pressure became too intense, would slip causing a quake of rebellion and violence.

The purpose of this paper will be to explore the histories of these two movements while demonstrating how the Second revolt is the culmination of a history of a cyclical pattern of violence between the province of Judaea and the Roman Empire. The structure of this paper will examine a general history of Hellenization along with the history of the messianic movement, and then demonstrate how movements specifically effected the era and thought of Hadrian and Simon Bar Kokhba, resulting in another quake of rebellion. The discussion on the effects of Hadrian's decision to implement Aelia Capitolina and

the universal ban on circumcision will also be specifically addressed and how that these events exacerbated an already volatile situation.

### **What is Hellenization?**

The most significant element of the Roman Empire is known today as Hellenism. Hellenism is the process of creating a universally Greek culture and ideology throughout the Empire for the purpose of maintaining order and stability. Therefore it is easy to infer that Hellenism acted as a hegemonic tool employed by the ruling power. It should be noted that at the time period of Hadrian's succession, the Empire had more than 40 provinces of different cultures with a total population of 60 million.<sup>[1]</sup> The Empire's political leadership consisted of only 350 officials to direct such a vast and diverse population. In order to achieve a political cohesiveness and political order, "Greekness" had been spread throughout the Empire with the hopes of creating a common bond between the central Government in Rome and her subjects. The way in which Hellenization occurred happened through a process of shared architecture, cultural events, and religion.

### **Who benefited and who suffered under Hellenization?**

In studying the Second Jewish Revolt, people too often think that every single Jew believed in the revolt and rebelled. However the populations of the rebels were confined in a small geographical area based in rural surroundings implying that peasants comprised the majority of the rebels. Many Jews that lived in the urban areas had been successfully Hellenized however. Foreign policies were changing the religious and political landscape of their home. The future identity of Judaea was at a crucial point of

importance. Jews were given two options; (a) assimilate or (b) make a stand of what they believed in.

### **Divided we stand: Hellenized and Orthodox Jews**

This is the critical ideological split that was occurring throughout the Maccabean revolt of 166 B.C.E., the first Jewish revolt of 66 C.E., the Diaspora of 115, and then followed by the Second Jewish Revolt. According to Schafer, Hadrian's policies were not controversial since many different Jewish groups themselves supported Hellenization.<sup>[2]</sup> Many of the Jewish upper class supported Hadrian since it would boost the economy as well as the status of the province.

### **The Hellenized Upper Class**

As far back as the Maccabean revolt, there were class divisions in Judaea. The upper class were clearly "pro-Greek" since they had money to buy and trade with them. Since the rich had money, their dependence upon a God was not rooted as strongly as the lower class which had nothing else to depend on. Schafer provides epigraphical proof of Roman Military certificates awarded to a Jew from Caesarea fighting as a Roman soldier by the name of L. Cornelius in the year 70. Later, in 151, another Roman certificate was awarded to a Jew who fought for the Roman army by the name of Barsimso Callisthenis from Casarea. These documents illustrate that in Judaea, not every one supported the rebellions. It also strongly supports the principle of regionalism since evidence of Jewish people fighting for Rome was found twice in the same area of Caesarea, one during the first revolt, and the other during the second.

Schafer also mentions that there was a “mixed” reaction to the Roman hegemony in the Jewish community and those that were traditionalist Jews “misinterpreted” the intent of these policies. A “cultural frustration” amongst the Jewish populations was evident as their culture and traditions ( identity) were trying to be molded by a Hellenized world. This frustration made Judaea one of the most politically, culturally, and religiously ambivalent provinces inside the Roman Empire.

### **The Unhellenized Lower Class**

The monotheistic emphasis of the lower class did not parallel the beliefs practiced by the Greeks and Romans. During the Macabbean Revolt, the frustration amongst the lower class was caused by a ban on circumcision and the celebration of the Sabbath.

<sup>[3]</sup>Antiochus embarrassed the Jews by mocking their religious practices and forcing them to conform to a different form of practice. Economic frustration met by a harsh tax policy led to bandits in Hacedene not paying their taxes. During the revolt of 66 C.E., Roman policy caused divisions amongst the Jews. The war did not begin with a united Jewish front, but rather a divided Jewish society of various factions, gradually, however, the Jews began to unify as the hellenising policies lost popularity amongst the High Priestly Class.<sup>[4]</sup> This revolt of 66 C.E. began amongst the rural peasants who were the religious fanatics who were irate that someone other than God would have control of their temples and make decisions for them. The revolt spread to the upper class as Agrippa II’s pro Roman stance became unpopular. Smallwood comments on the conditions preceding the Second Jewish revolt produced an environment strikingly similar to that of previous revolts. She states that “an endemic nationalism, never wholly dormant kept the Jews in

a state of mounting tension from the time of the abortive rising under Trajan until two specific acts of provocation on the Roman side”, insisting that that the Aelia Capitolina itself probably “pushed them over the edge.”<sup>[5]</sup> She continues by saying that this pattern was “not too dissimilar to that of the decade before 66 A.D.” Hadrian’s policies on creating a new name for the capitol, and a ban on circumcision were not the first time such policies were imposed on the Jews. Judaea is like an orphaned teenage child who has different parents imposing strict rules upon them. Rebellion will always happen if the child feels he has no personal sovereignty. We shall now examine a general history of Jewish foreign relations and witness a re-occurring cycle of rebellion.

### **Importance of Hellenizing the Jewish Nation**

To fully comprehend the political environment preceding the Second Jewish Revolt, it is necessary to know the prior disputes leading up to the rebellion since many of these historical events prior to the revolt caused them to happen. Since history is interpreted differently, an understanding of the Roman view and the perspective of the Jews is necessary to know the motives of both parties during the Second revolt. Let’s begin by looking at the Romans and their historical understanding of the Judaeian province.

The Jews had been a people oppressed by many people before the year of the revolt in 132 C E. Egypt, Assyria, the Seleucids, had all staked claims for Judaea. The Romans themselves were no different than any other conqueror, they wanted land to increase their empire and increase revenue. The Jewish religion differed significantly to - that of the Roman Empire. Their monotheistic beliefs conflicted with the many Gods

praised by Rome along with a cultural barrier formed by language, education, and different customs. Numerous attempts would be made by the various empires to subject Judaea to the Hellenization of the Greek world. This continual friction would be met with tension, sometimes violence, and a few times, open rebellion. Even when the region was peaceful, it had only been due to the fact that the ruling empire had punished the Jews into a state of submission. Tension between the two cultures always lingered for over 400 years.

Judaea was strategically important as it sat between the Seleucid Empire and their rival Egyptian empire. The Greek Seleucids knew how important the small province was so they attempted to promote Greek culture in ever so surely through the process of Hellenization under Antiochus the IV, 165 B C E. <sup>[6]</sup> Antiochus attempted to use Greek culture and ideology as a cohesive element in the Seleucid empire that allows for Greek political objectives to be achieved.

The Seleucids realized that in order to be able to implement their ways of thought, they must first install a leader of the province that would represent their objectives. This was achieved by installing a new High Priest under the name of Jason to lead the “Jewish Temple State.” This scared many of the Orthodox Jews because they witnessed for the first time that the Sacred Torah was not the foundation of their law making process. This change in power led to new constitutional reforms that were pro-Greek. Gymnasiums were established, including Gods and Pagan rituals that would not have sat well with the strict followers of the Torah. This employment of Hellenization would create a strong belief of fanaticism inside the Jewish faith.

### **Early signs of Messianic Movement caused by Hellenization**



The belief in a Messiah, or Savior is an ancient one among the Jews. The need for a Savior had developed because of continual oppression by ruling empires that would not allow them to practice their religion the way God intended. The shift in Jewish culture caused by Jason the High Priest led to the events found in Jewish books of the Maccabees. In the book of 1 Maccabees, it states that:

“And the king (Jason) sent letters by the hand of messengers unto Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, that they should follow laws strange to the land, and should forbid whole burnt offerings and sacrifice and drink offerings in the sanctuary; and should profane the Sabbaths and feasts, and pollute the sanctuary and the holy ones; that they should build altars, and temples, and shrines for idols, and should sacrifice swine’s flesh and unclean beasts, and that they should leave their sons uncircumcised, that they should make their souls abominable with all manner of uncleanness and profanation; so that they might forget the law, and change all the ordinances. And whosoever shall not do according to the word of the king, he shall die.”<sup>[7]</sup>

The accuracy of this excerpt from the book of Macabees states that many Jews, felt that their most sacred rights were being threatened by a foreign power. To understand the importance of the temple and why the Jews would be so upset by a change in their Torah based organization of rule, Seth Schwartz describes the function of the Torah in Jewish society as follows:

“God, Temple, and Torah (Jewish scriptures) constituted an ideological complex of remarkable simplicity. If its neatness and coherence gave it a certain force, its clear inadequacy as an explanation of the operation of the human world was its potential weakness. Everything in the system was unique: the one God chose the one people of

Israel as his own, and the Temple as the only place where they might worship him. He also gave them one Torah, whose laws they are obliged to study and observe.”<sup>[8]</sup>

From reading this description of the basics of Judaism, it is clear to see that orthodox Jews would be enraged by their temple and Torah being undermined. The temple and the Torah acted as key foundations of the Jewish Religion and it is easy to see why such a panic would have arisen.

The initiator of the revolt of 166 B.C.E. is unknown. 2 Maccabees states: “That Antiochus IV attacked Jerusalem while under the false impression that it had rebelled against him.”<sup>[9]</sup> The validity of this statement is difficult to prove but nonetheless the revolt did take place and as Daniel Schwartz illustrates that “any clashes occurred must be due to “misunderstandings.”<sup>[10]</sup> It seems highly probable that Schwartz’s statement is true. Neither the Seleucids nor Jews would want war, but misunderstandings between the province of Judaea and the Seleucid government were likely inevitable due to the distance and language barriers that separated them.

The following years were moderately peaceful. but the fact remained that the Jews did not have control over their own land. From 37-4 BCE, Herod the Great is a prime example of a Roman Client-king who “exploited the Sanhedrin and the office of High Priest for his own purposes.”<sup>[11]</sup> Once Herod consolidated his power, he walked a thin line in diplomacy with the Jews to make sure he did not overstep his bounds and create a rebellion.

The stability between Rome and their Jewish subjects frequently remained on a fragile balance. The Romans knew to have a certain amount of respect for foreign beliefs if they wished to maintain order. Hellenization did have a successful achievement with

many of the rich urbanites in Judaea; however it caused a religious fervor amongst the rural poor who remained very orthodox in their beliefs.

During the years between 44-46 CE we see the seeds of a Messianic movement were planted inside Judea which would not stop growing until the destruction of the Bar Kokba Revolt. A man named Theudas claimed to have the power of God by leading a large group of people to the River Jordan where he promised he could part the river just as Moses parted the Red Sea. This is worth noting because of the importance of Moses in Jewish history. Moses not only was a prophet, but a leader who freed his people from the slavery of the Egyptians. The fact that Theudas chose to act as Moses proves that a need for “freedom” must have been necessary. Cuspius Fadus broke up the crowd and caught the self-claimed prophet Theudas and beheaded him.

Just a few years later (46-48) CE, a famine caused much hardship for the rural population. This famine also created a Zealot movement which caused fear in the procurator Tiberius Alexander. Tiberius had the leaders of the movement killed by crucifixion to demonstrate what would happen if the Zealots decided to rebel.

Later in the governorship of Ventidius Cumanus (48-52), at a Passover festival, a Roman soldier “lifted up his garment and exposed his garment and bent over indecently” in front of a Jewish crowd. This action does not accord very well with respecting one of the most holy days on the Jewish calendar and resulted in a riot. Some Romans were killed, but it is recorded that up to 30, 000 Jews died as a result of the riot.<sup>[12]</sup>

This perpetual violence and misunderstandings proved as catalyst for the Messianic Movement in Judaea. Schafer writes that the period following the riot and preceding the first Jewish revolt was “characterized by the appearance on the scene of

numerous enthusiastic prophets and demagogues who made all sorts of numerous promises to the people and led them in to the desert in order to show them apocalyptic wonders.”<sup>[13]</sup> In a desperate attempt to hinder the Messianic movement, the Romans applied a stern hand of force destroying the temple and killing a high number of Jews and Romans. Josephus claims there were 1.1 million Jews killed, but there is no proof to back up this claim, that number is likely an exaggeration. Many Jews were also enslaved and shipped off to various locations in the empire.<sup>[14]</sup> The same thing would happen during the Second Revolt in Jerusalem.

The Jews were frequently punished for their rebellions by destructions of their temples. Antiochus destroyed the temple after the Maccabean revolt of 166 and Titus destroyed the temple after the rebellion of 66-70, the destruction of the Jerusalem temple.<sup>[15]</sup> By destroying the temple, the Romans did not destroy the Jews sense of identity. Many emperors had to deal with Judaea and some like Domitian (81-96 A.D) were hurt by this tiny province. The Senatorial Aristocracies Humanization had become a form of protest against Domitian. Domitian sentenced, M’ Acilius Glabrio to death by wrestling a lion for the crime of Judaization. An amulet found later in the Nahal Hever cave (a cave inhabited by Bar Kochba followers) with a picture of a man fighting a lion. This shows that crimes against Jews by Rome were recorded and retold amongst Jewish tradition. Domitian had also judged that two people (one of them his wife) should be “penalized” for the crime of Judaization during a time when he feared a “Messianic Movement.” The fact that Domitian feared a Messianic Movement proves that although Judaea had been destroyed only 20 years earlier, shows the hesitancy and caution that an Emperor prescribed to the Judean province. After Domitian, Trajan (98-117 A.D.) was

certainly apprehensive of the Jews as he followed Domitian's lead and investigated the kindred of the royal line of David and had some of these kindred put to death. By 115, tensions in Jewish communities throughout the empire escalated in the form of violence. What is very interesting is that there is no known cause for the rebellion. Smallwood claims that the Jews revolted as a result of Trajan's Parthian war and the fact that he pulled one of the two legions out of Egypt. Furthermore, Smallwood asserts that the Jews in Alexandria saw a temporary weakness and wanted a chance to get revenge on the religious tension that had been mounting for some time.<sup>[16]</sup> Alexander Fuks argues that there is no known reason because of the irrationality of the Messianic movement. Fuks compliments the work done by scholars who support the idea that this Messianic movement is the main cause for such an unexplainable event. His reasoning is based on two pieces of evidence. The first is that of a comment made by Eusebius that a "king named Lucas had united forces of the Cyrenean and Egyptian Jews together."<sup>[17]</sup> The mentioning of a "king" is significant according to the scholar Tcherikover, who states that the mention of a king is equal to Messiah. The fact that a king is mentioned does not necessarily mean that the Jews believed that he was the Messiah, but that they could possibly have believed it until the rebellion failed. Support for Fuk's argument is found in evidence at Cyrene where many pagan statues and temples were destroyed. This indicates that if the pagan symbols were the aim of the frustration, then the violators were strongly opposed and offended by them. Therefore, it is easy to deduce that the violators were Jewish fanatics. The friction between the Jews who had been dispersed finally erupted. However, the extreme uprisings came not in Judaea, but in Cyrene, Cyprus, and Egypt. Fuks concludes his argument by saying that "the Jews had not only declared war

against the pagans but also against their Gods.” Although not a full rebellion, the Jewish “civil unrest” showed how volatile the Jewish situation was. As Fuks mentions, the Jewish Diaspora of 115 did not ignite for any specific reason, he believes that the cause was based solely on the growing Messianic Movement and frustration felt by the Jewish population in areas that were barraged with Hellenized culture.<sup>[18]</sup> Gray writes that following the uprising in Egypt, that the Greeks in Egypt clearly felt animosity towards the Jews that had previously caused such lawlessness. The Greeks mention in a papyrus found that they demanded that the “Godless Jews” could be taken out of Alexandria and moved somewhere else.<sup>[19]</sup> This assault of Hellenization had not quite reached such full force in the province of Judaea and for this the outbreak did not unleash there.

Following the Jewish Diaspora, no conflict is listed between the Jews and Romans for over 10 years. The Messianic Movement did continue to grow and perpetuated immensely as many Jews had just been recently oppressed by the Roman Empire. A leader for the Jews would spring out of this movement to lead them to what they believed would be their independence. This promised Messiah is who we call Simon Bar Kokhba.

### **Bar Kokhba: Origins of the claimed Messiah?**

Leo Mildenberg provides three sources to legitimize the Messianic development of Bar Kokba. Firstly, he states the Jewish belief that is founded in the Bible. A well known scripture of the time of the Messianic movement professed that a leader would arise, it reads in (Numbers 24: 17): “A star shall come out of Jacob, to lead Israel to victory.” Jacob is the father of the 12 tribes of Israel, and holds an important role in the

religious beliefs of Orthodox Jews. Secondly, Bar Kokba is reportedly to have been confirmed as being from the house of Jacob by the Rabbi Akiba.<sup>[20]</sup> This is extremely important because according to Bernard Henderson, Rabbi Akiba already obtained the title of the “spiritual father of the rebellion”, meaning that the Bar Kokhba achieved his title from the leader of the rebellion.<sup>[21]</sup> This meant that Bar Kokba had received his calling from the highest authority, giving him full legitimacy to become the desperately awaited Messiah. Thirdly, Mildenberg argues that the Messiah’s original name is Simon Bar Kosiba. In Aramaic, the word for star is Kokba. Since the two names are so similar, the transformation from Kosiba to Kokba would have been an easy transformation to fulfill the well known prophecy in Numbers.<sup>[22]</sup> Eusebius calls Bar Kokba a “charlatan, a murderous brigand who traded in his title and pretended to be a star which descended from heaven to give light to the oppressed by miracles.”<sup>[23]</sup>

To support the belief in an intensifying Messianic Movement, a study of coins that date to the time of Bar Kokba prove to be valid as a representation of the Messianic Movement. Hugo Mantel sheds the light on some of the coins and gives us a key to understanding the beliefs of the Jewish people.

The first symbolism that is significant of the Bar Kokba period is that of a coin that has citrus fruit and a palm branch on it. This image dates back to the time of the Hasmoneans.<sup>[24]</sup> The Hasmoneans led the revolt against Antiochus IV and Mantel writes that they shared a common objective with the followers of Bar Kokba, fighting for “spiritual and political freedom.”

The distribution of these coins can tell us the extent of Hellenisation and Messianism. Large amounts of Bar KoKba coins are found mainly in the central part of

the country. Dr. Kadman has noted that no coins of the revolt could be “reliably authenticated” in the “north of the country.”<sup>[25]</sup> This means that the revolt was not widespread throughout the Jewish communities, but contained to a specific area in Judaea, mainly the rural areas. An interesting observation may be that of the 9 locations of Jewish resistance, nearly half of the battles took place directly surrounding Jerusalem. This illustrates the importance of Jerusalem, politically for Rome, and religiously for the Jews.<sup>[26]</sup> To prove the point archaeologically, Mantel informs us of the symbols on the revolt coins. One coin portrays a vine, which symbolizes the people of Israel, of the Torah, of the Patriarchs, of the Sanhedrin, and of the Sages of Israel.<sup>[27]</sup> On another coin is found a jug, which is symbolic of the oil of the Hanukkah miracle. This religious connection is found again in a letter found in the cave of Waddi Muabba’at, where Bar Kokba is described as the leader of the Sanhedrin. The following is written by Simon Bar Kokba: “On the twentieth of Shebat, year two for the redemption of Israel by the hand of Simon Bar Kochba, the Nasi (leader of the Sanhedrin) of Israel.”<sup>[28]</sup> This history of the Messianic movement came into a full collision with the wave of Hellenization promoted by the Emperor Hadrian.

### **Hadrian the Hellenizer**

Hadrian grew up learning the ways of Greek culture. As a child, he studied Greek literature, art, and philosophy. He earned the name “Graeculus”, meaning “little Greek.”<sup>[29]</sup> Trajan had dealt with the Jewish Diaspora in the 115-117. Many of his policies were directed in containing an outbreak that had already occurred. Hadrian saw how this “unrest” impeded Trajan's legitimacy. He was given the unlucky responsibility



directly after the Jewish Diaspora of (a) improving the empire (b) formulating a prescription that would pressure the Jews not to rebel but at the same time assimilating them into a Hellenized culture. The Jews disagreed with many of Rome's policies since they were imposed on them. These policies were not given to Judaea in one day rather they were implemented over a long period of time that created "cultural friction". As these policies surfaced and resurfaced, different reactions were met by the Jews, some more hostile than others.

Unlike his predecessors, Hadrian did not look to expand the empire. Hadrian chose to focus on the inward improvement opposed to outward expansion. His "aim was to bring order and peace to the land bounded by the new frontiers of the Roman world."<sup>[30]</sup> Hadrian's main objective was to unify the empire into a cohesive empire that would remain peaceful instead of being plagued with war. Pringsheim says that Hadrian followed the Stoic doctrine and believed that the Emperor acted as a servant to his people and that he should do everything to protect his subjects. This inward improvement caused numerous changes in the empire.<sup>[31]</sup>

The biggest objective of Hadrian's career surely must be his development of the Panhellenion. This league of 33 cities clearly shows Hadrian's desire to unify the empire through the adoption of Hellenistic culture. Ilaria Romeo writes that "Greek civilization is perhaps the most characteristic trait of his personality."<sup>[32]</sup> This Greekness would have an influential role on Hadrian and the decisions he would make. The Panhellenion was not only a club, but it was an opportunity for cities of the empire to gain economic and cultural status. Hadrian funded numerous building projects. He funded engineering projects such as roadwork, aqueducts, harbors, etc. According to Boatwright, the three

main purposes for the large amount of engineering construction is to reflect the greatness of Rome, to validate the emperor's might, and for economic benefit.<sup>[33]</sup> He built utilitarian structures in the form of city walls, squares boulevards, etc. Temples and tombs (20 total) were either restored or built with the intention of showing off the "grandeur of Rome." The headquarters of the Panhellenion resided in Athens and Hadrian rewarded the city with a temple of Hera and Zeus.<sup>[34]</sup> The genius behind the Panhellenion is that it provided a sense of pride among the Greek societies and a sense of being. The purpose was also to establish a center for Greek culture that would eventually spread throughout the empire. Hadrian prescribed the right temples in the right cities. He knew which Gods were heroes in each specific city. Romeo states the strategic importance of each city's role in the Panhellenion when he says that "the Panhellenic ideology elaborated within the circle of the Greek cities of Asia Minor ultimately determined that authentic Greekness should derive only from the historical centers of Hellenism, which Athens naturally assumed the most important role."<sup>[35]</sup> It is worth noting that the emphasis on history is what gave the patriotic sense to the nationalistic aspect of Greek pride. Although Hadrian did not develop the Panhellenion until 131 or 132, it is still clear to see Hadrian's intentions for the empire to grow into a solidified and Greek culture. Because Hadrian adopted such measures as the Panhellenion on his list of projects to realize, it is fair to assume that other decisions and policies regarding the empire could have been directly influenced from his Greek upbringing.

Because of Hadrian's leadership in creating a unified empire by peaceful means, it is clear through many evidences that he became very popular throughout the empire. The letters "P, P" are chiseled in on buildings constructed during his reign. The P

followed by another P stands for “Pater Patriae.”<sup>[36]</sup> Pater Patriae translates to “Father of the Fatherland.” Hadrian more than likely acquired this name as a result of his traveling and meeting with predominately every province in the empire. He treated his Greek cities as children and felt as the protector of the empire. As Hadrian traveled and took care of many cities, it is known that he had plans on improving a city that would not receive him with open arms, the city of Jerusalem.

### **Question of Aelia Capitolina**

Hadrian, as Pater Patriae may have become too confident in his Hellenizing skills and this is understandable due to the amazing amount of success he had, not only in the “Greek” cities, but also near Jerusalem, in the town of Sepphoris.

Sepphoris had been successfully transformed into Diocaesarea, signifying that the remedy of Hellenization could work in the Mid-east. To achieve Hadrian’s political agenda, he knew that he must successfully transform the city of Jerusalem. This however would be more difficult than Sepphoris, since Jerusalem was more than just a city, it stood as the religious capital and symbol for all believers of Yahweh (Hebrew God).

Dio Cassius wrote that this refounding of the city is what caused the rebellion.<sup>[37]</sup> He writes the following: “When Hadrian had founded at Jerusalem a city of his own in place of the one destroyed, which he called Aelia Capitolina, and on the site of the temple of their God erected another temple to Jupiter, the great and long war broke out. For the Jews regarded it as a horrible outrage that foreigners should settle in their city, and that temples for strange gods should be built in it.”<sup>[38]</sup>

Eusebius says that the foundation of Aelia Capitolina and the temple of Jupiter were punishment of the revolt.<sup>[39]</sup> It seems more likely to me that these events caused the Jews to rebel. Something must have set them off, and with Hadrian's urban renewal around the empire correlates with the beginning of the Jewish revolt, the obvious inference to be made is to consider Dio as the more highly valid source between the two.

It is also important to note the new name of the Hellenized city, Aelia Capitolina. Aelia, the first part of the name, was inscribed to remind people that Aelius Hadrianus "alone" was the "real holder of power in Jerusalem, and that Jupiter Capitolinus alone, the real father of gods and the patron of Rome, dwells in Jerusalem." To add insult to injury Hadrian decided to build a temple to Jupiter inside of Jerusalem with the hopes that he could advertise the ruling empire.<sup>[40]</sup> Isaac and Roll show that coins have been found dating to the year of 120 with pictures of Zeus sitting in a temple near Jerusalem in the city of Tiberias, located in Galilee (possibly Antiochus or Nike).<sup>[41]</sup>

It is interesting to see how Hadrian transformed cities like Athens, Smyrna, Philadelphia, etc., as he did in Jerusalem, but how tragic the response differed than the other cities which he had adopted. His intentions were to improve the city just as he had other cities but he failed to persuasively communicate this to an already suspicious people.

Smallwood comments on the conditions preceding the Second Jewish revolt followed a similar recipe for rebellion to that of the past disputes between Rome and the Jews. She states that "an endemic nationalism, never wholly dormant kept the Jews in a state of mounting tension from the time of the abortive rising under Trajan until two specific acts of provocation on the Roman side", insisting that the Aelia Capitolina itself

probably “pushed them over the edge.” She continues by saying that this pattern was “not too dissimilar to that of the decade before 66 A.D.”<sup>[42]</sup> Hadrian’s policies of creating a new name for the capital, and banning circumcision were not the first time such policies were imposed on the Jews. By examining a general history of Jewish foreign relations, we can see a reoccurring cycle of rebellion.

As previously mentioned, the Jews had temples destroyed, bans on their sacred religious practices, and had strict taxes applied to them. The problem of the political motivations of Hadrian and how they clashed with traditionalist Jewish beliefs resulted in a cultural and political “slip” as the plates of conflicting ideologies once again began to tremble.

Hadrian’s desire for everything Greek was based on peaceful measures that intended to unify the empire, however as he attempted to Hellenize the empire, he may have slightly overdone it in Judaea. He would never have meant to aggravate the Jews but I believe that he had so much success in the rest of the empire and that he gained such popularity that he began to think that he could do whatever he wanted and Judaea would continue to love him. Schafer raises a valid point when he writes “the political cooperation between Hellenized Jews and Hadrian undoubtedly intensified the situation and perhaps led to a state of affairs in which the revolt was the only way left to stop what the pious saw as a fatal development.”<sup>[43]</sup> It is likely Hadrian believed that he had the support for this installment of Aelia Capitolina from the upper class of the Jews themselves. The response of the orthodox peasantry was not factored into Hadrian’s decision. Schafer goes on to say that “he (Hadrian) may have become, like Antiochus IV, the ‘catalyst’ in a process over which he eventually lost control.”<sup>[44]</sup>

### **Additional Misunderstandings: Taxes, oppression, and Military Presence**

Jewish hostility towards Hadrian was exacerbated by his strict economic policies. . Hadrian did not initiate this economic battle between the two peoples. Directly after the 1<sup>st</sup> Jewish revolt, Vespasian wanted to reward his allies of Veterans and Aristocrats by giving them land.<sup>[45]</sup> Applebaum continues to say that Vespasian kept most of the land, kicking Jewish cultivators off their land and forcing them to become renters who would have to pay steep prices to landlords appointed by Vespasian. A tax had also been imposed following the first revolt called the “fiscus Judaicus”, a tax of two denarii.<sup>[46]</sup> While this amount of money is not recorded as extremely burdening, the mere fact that a special tax had been made for the Jews had been perceived as embarrassing. Applebaum explains that in Josephus, the Jews describe the landlords as “harassers.” These confiscations of holdings are recorded in the Midrashim.<sup>[47]</sup> Applebaum concludes that these economic conditions were likely to have continued up until the time of Hadrian. He states that economic conditions during the time of Hadrian’s accession were particularly bad. Referring to the beginning of the Second revolt, Applebaum states that the Talmudic tradition points to the Jewish peasantry as the main initiator of the revolt of 131.<sup>[48]</sup> He also adds that Eusebius describes Bar Kokba as “one sent to aid the oppressed.” The oppressed would easily fit the description of the lower class peasants whose families had felt economically oppressed for more than 60 years from the time of Vespasian to Hadrian. From the map given by Applebaum, it is worth noting that of the 9 points of Jewish resistance during the second revolt, every point of conflict is marked in a rural setting. This suggests that the Jewish armies thought they would have an

advantage in rural settings. People who knew the geography of these rural setting were predominately lower class peasants.

It is also clear that directly following the Diaspora, there was a Roman interest in strengthening the military infrastructure inside Judaea. Judaea was made into a consular province entitling it to one more legion in the province. Archaeological evidence gives a milestone of a road from Caparcotna to Diocaesarea.<sup>[49]</sup> Listed on the milestone is Hadrian's name. Applebaum states that Hadrian repaired similar roads in 129-135 CE, so it is fair to conclude that the road in Caparcotna was built in the same time. This would accompany the installation of a new legion that would necessitate routes to travel upon. Applebaum also concludes that because it was repaired in 129, it was built around 120, when the headquarters of the first Galilean (4 Ferrata) command were set up in Caparcotna.<sup>[50]</sup> With the two legions totaling a force of 24,000 men to equip and with all the repairs of transportation, it is obvious to say that taxes would have been raised to pay for the forces.<sup>[51]</sup> Hadrian may also have had personal reasons for avoiding a conflict with the Jews. Hadrian did not wish to conflict with Judaea for personal reasons also. Schafer mentions that he did not want "ambitious rivals to lead campaigns against Judaea and succeed."<sup>[52]</sup> Securing the empire would have been an easier and a more achievable goal than allowing more unrest to unfold. It also would have made sense for Hadrian to have enough soldiers to protect hostile borders that continually had rival empires near them. However, to the Jews' perspective, this amount of military activity could very well have been interpreted as Rome taking over the land and molding their land into a Roman province. Once again, a misunderstanding could very well have been a cause for the intensifying of relations between the two peoples.

## **Circumcision**

Not many scholars can agree whether or not the ban on circumcision was introduced before or after the revolt. E. Mary Smallwood (1976) begins her argument by pointing out that in the *Historia Augusta* is a passage written by a Roman Emperor (who ruled after Hadrian) about easing the “law of castration.”<sup>[53]</sup> Smallwood points out that the word “castration”, not “circumcision” is used so it is possible that there was no connection, but Smallwood also points out that castration could be used to mean circumcision. Here Smallwood has no proof, she is merely assuming through referential inference that it is possible that this documentation of the word castration was meant as circumcision. Smallwood also refers to a series of satire plays written prior to the Jewish Revolt in 128 A.D. The author of these satires relates his play to the “time of Judaizers” and mentions that circumcision were occurring without any oppression by Roman rule. But another document written by a Rabbi before the revolution mentions that there was a “time of persecutions”, or attacks on the Jewish way of life. What is clear is that Hadrian would not have gone out of his way to stir up the population of Judaea. It is more than likely that this confusion as Smallwood represents was a miscommunication or a cultural misunderstanding.

As previously mentioned, the answer for the confusion may lie in the past. During the Maccabean Revolt, Antiochus the IV feared that an “unassimilated nation so close to his enemies stood as a threat” and that he would have to “convert or exterminate such of their numbers whose devotion to Judaism argued disloyalty to Syria (Antiochus).”<sup>[54]</sup> His method of extermination came through banning their rites, and it should be remembered



that Antiochus did not have a personal vendetta against the Jews, he had an ulterior motive of solidifying his frontiers based on fear that instability would reign. Similarly, Hadrian although nearly three hundred years later, had a goal not to expand the empire but to improve it within. Hadrian's diagnosis for this as shown through his mass building projects came in the form of Hellenization. If Hadrian did put a ban on circumcision, it is clear that he did not specifically aim this policy at the Jews. His ban was based on a universal ban, which more than likely stemmed from his Greek beliefs that the body is pure in its natural form. His intent is simple to understand that the motivation behind the policy to ban circumcision had been rooted in his goal of a universal empire based on Greek ideologies.

## **Conclusion**

Many different conclusions have been made as to the result of the Second Jewish Revolt. What is clear is that the policies of Hadrian alone did not cause the rebellion. The trends of Hellenism and Messianism created a series of misunderstandings and violence that oscillated back and forth through the duration of the Judean-Roman relationship. Hadrian's policies merely reflected the roots of other Emperors yet his amplification of Hellenism in the empire did further deepen divisions inside Judaea that were being dug by outside empires for an extended period of time effecting generations of Jews. Since the days of Antiochus IV to Trajan, the Jews had developed a "paranoia" of hegemonic empires. From the destruction of temples, land confiscation, and military conflicts, the scene in Judaea was like a continental plate pressing fiercely against a larger and stronger plate. It would only take a minor slip to start a violent quake.

Commenting on the events leading up to the Second revolt, Smallwood argues that the “picture of friction over a minor matter a tense situation to explode into violence.”<sup>[55]</sup>

This statement may be well valid in concluding the events of the Jews and Romans in the period prior to Second Jewish revolt.

As pressure was put on Judaea to change to a Hellenized world, different groups of the urban population favored this change. Others, such as the rural peasants, who had little money, felt that their only possession, their religious practices, were being challenged by a Heathen who did not respect the way they believed in. As so many times before in Judean-Roman diplomacy, “cultural miscommunication” had occurred and the two very different peoples of the Hellenized world conflicted with that of the rural Peasants of Judaea. The Hellenized people looked for a prosperous Greek civilization while the Judean peasants looked to Bar Kokba, the “son of a star”, to lead them from oppression.<sup>[56]</sup>

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<sup>[2]</sup> Peter Schafer, "Hadrian's Policy in Judaea And The Bar Kokhba Revolt," in A Tribute to Geza Vermes: Essays of Jewish and Christian Literature and History, ed. P.R. Davies & R.T. White, (Sheffield, 1990), 297.

<sup>[3]</sup> E. Mary Smallwood, The Jews under Roman Rule (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976), 3.

<sup>[4]</sup> Ibid., 293.

<sup>[5]</sup> Ibid., 438.

<sup>[6]</sup> Peter Schafer, The History of the Jews in the Greco-Roman World (New York: Routledge Publishing, 2003), 36.

<sup>[7]</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>[8]</sup> Seth Schwartz, Imperialism and Jewish Society: 200 BCE – 640 CE (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 49.

<sup>[9]</sup> 2 Maccabees 5: 11, quoted in Martha Himmelfarb, "Judaism and Hellenism in 2 Maccabees," Poetics Today vol. 18, no.1 (1998), 20.

<sup>[10]</sup> Daniel Schwartz, "How at Home were the Jews of the Hellenistic Era?" Classical Philology vol. 95, no. 3 (July, 2000): 347.

<sup>[11]</sup> Seth Schwartz, 117.

<sup>[12]</sup> Smallwood, 265.

<sup>[13]</sup> Schafer, 114.

<sup>[14]</sup> Seth Schwartz , 108.

<sup>[15]</sup> Shimon Applebaum, Prolegomena to the Study of the Second Jewish Revolt (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1976), 2.

<sup>[16]</sup> Smallwood, 395.

<sup>[17]</sup> Eusebius, The Church History: A New Translation with Commentary Translation by Paul L. Maier, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publishing, 1999), 135.

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<sup>[21]</sup> Bernard Henderson, The Life and Principate of the Emperor Hadrian (London: Meuthen and Co. Ltd, 1923), 217.

<sup>[22]</sup> Mildenberg, 314.

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